

# water quantity

## planning for Iowa's future

The issue of water quantity – how much water Iowa has available – has come to light with the recent increase in major industries that use water to power their operations. While we are not facing an immediate shortage, there have not been resources at the state level to properly look at water quantity issues in recent years. We must plan in the long-term for future industry, drinking water and other water uses.

### Reduced resources

Practically all funding for water supply issues comes from the state general fund. Reductions in general fund revenues over the last 20 years have resulted in outdated information on water uses and water levels. Estimates on how much water is pulled from our streams, lakes and aquifers are 10 years old. The last updates on sustainability of aquifers are more than 20 years old.

To meet the water needs of Iowans both today and in the future, we need to know how much water we have available in surface water and underground aquifers. Aquifers are not easily or quickly replenished and not equally distributed across the state. Because of this, water quantity research must be a continual effort to ensure sustainable resources for the future.

### Iowa's water plan

Iowa's comprehensive water plan hasn't been updated since 1985. It summarizes what we know about Iowa's water resources and how to address problems. A revised water plan would include updated data on water levels and uses, as well as discussion of current policy and law regarding allocating water to different users. A water plan would quantify what is currently available in aquifers, trends over time in water levels, current levels of use, and most importantly, projections for future water use in the state. A water plan would also

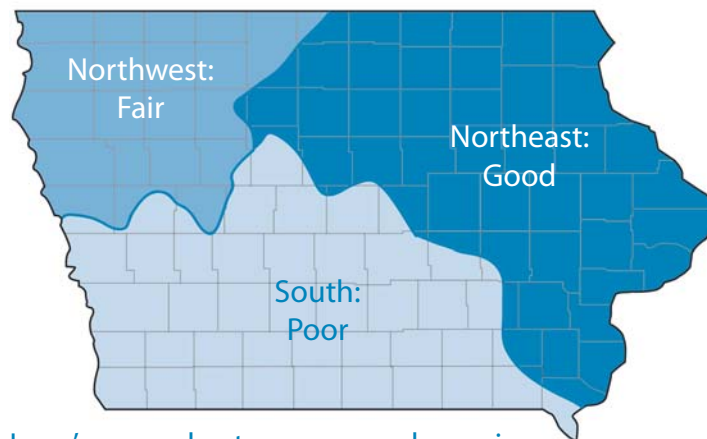
consider drought and water conservation planning and economic development.

### Why update the water plan?

Much has changed in the last 20 years, including the pattern of demand on water supplies. Iowa's population is shifting from rural to urban areas, focusing demands for water. There have been rises in ethanol and other "wet" industries as well as in concentration of livestock.

An updated plan is needed to avoid water shortages, crises and conflicts between water users in the future. A new plan could help the state better explore economic development opportunities. For example, providing industries with comprehensive information on groundwater could help find the best sites for potential plants.

The key is to update the plan regularly to account for new water uses as they emerge, and changes in our knowledge of the resource. We cannot afford to wait another 20 years to update our state's water plan. We need a new effort to characterize our groundwater sources, monitor trends in groundwater levels and stream flows, and improve our allocation process to assure that our water supply, and the economic growth it supports, is sustainable for the long term.



Iowa's groundwater resources by region.



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